



**Testimony of Correction Officer Sean Howard, President, AFSCME Local 387
Labor and Public Employees Committee
HB 5356 An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers**

Greetings, Chairwoman Kushner, Chairwoman Porter, ranking members, and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.

My name is Sean Howard. I work as a Correction Officer at Cheshire Correctional Institution. I also serve as the President of AFSCME Local 387, representing front-line staff throughout the Cheshire correctional complex.

I am testifying today in support of HB 5356, An Act Concerning Pandemic Pay for Essential Workers. This important legislation would provide a payment of \$2,000 for full time and \$1,000 to part time workers deemed as essential during the pandemic.

When COVID started, state prisons quickly became a petri dish for the spread of the virus and its variants. My Local, along with AFSCME Local 391 and AFSCME Local 1565, had to buy 10,000 masks just to make sure correctional staff were protected because our agency wasn't prepared.

In February 2020, I contracted COVID-19 on the job. Two years later, I am still living with the damage. COVID-19 left me with a heart condition. It left me feeling fatigued and short of breath. It kept me from being able to play sports with my son. I will be living with the impact of COVID for the rest of my life.

I'm not the only one suffering. More than 1,300 front-line DOC employees across the state contracted COVID and its variants. Coupled with already inadequate staffing levels, the pandemic made our prisons even more dangerous.

Throughout this crisis, my fellow correctional employees and I got the job done for the people of Connecticut. We kept our facilities running, despite the risks, because our communities depended on us.

We were called heroes for our work. And I appreciate that. But it's simply not enough.

I strongly urge the committee to pass proposed bill 5356. Providing pandemic hero pay would be a meaningful way to thank essential workers for putting our lives and our health – and that of our families' – at risk for the good of our state. Thank you.